

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

May 2009



The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

MEMORIAL DAY OBSERVANCES These are free and open to the public.

Barrancas National Cemetery (Naval Air Station, 80 Hovey Road, Pensacola). On Saturday, May 23, the Boy Scouts will place American flags on the gravesites. The Memorial Day service is on Monday, May 25, at 9:00 AM (Central Time) in the Main Post Chapel. The Guest Speaker will be Escambia County Superintendent of Schools Malcolm Thomas, an Army veteran who served in the 101st Airborne Division. The Navy Choir will perform after the ceremony. For information call 850-453-4108.

Bay Pines National Cemetery (10,000 Bay Pines Boulevard, St Petersburg) The Memorial Day Service is on Monday, May 25, at 10:00 AM. The featured speaker will be Army Sgt Russell Piper, a wounded warrior. Shuttle service will be provided from the parking lot to the cemetery. For information call the Bay Pines VA Medical Center Voluntary Service at 727-398-9394.

Florida National Cemetery (6502 SW 102nd Avenue Bushnell) The Florida National Cemetery will hold its Memorial Day Ceremony on Monday, May 25, 2009 at 10:00 AM. The event is sponsored by the Florida National Cemetery Joint Veterans Committee (JVC). The Guest Speaker will be Mr. Thomas G. Bowman, Senior Advisor with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Sunshine Healthcare Network. Mr. Randy Price (99.5 WQYK) will be the Master of Ceremonies. Guests are invited to arrive early and enjoy the patriotic music prior to the ceremony courtesy of the Hernando High School Band. Vocalists and a bagpiper will perform. The Pasco County Sheriff's Office will provide a riderless horse. The Florida National Guard will provide the gun salute and posting of the colors. There will also be a flyover by Ye Mystic Air Krewe and a wreath presentation.

The Avenue of Flags consisting of approximately 400 plus flags will be on display along the roadways of the cemetery. These flags were donated to the cemetery by the next of kin of deceased veterans and were once draped over the caskets or cremation urns of veterans.

The Joint Veterans Committee and the Florida National Cemetery extend an invitation to all veterans' organizations and the general public to take this opportunity to remember the men and women who served and gave so much to protect our great nation. Organizations with colors are invited to participate in the massing of colors at the beginning of the program. Veterans' organizations should plan to arrive by 8:30 AM.

The Florida National Cemetery Visitor's Center will be open to the public on Memorial Day from 8:00 AM. to 4:30 PM. Cemetery representatives will be on duty to assist visitors with inquiries.

Seating is limited; those attending are encouraged to arrive early, wear comfortable clothing and bring a lawn chair or blanket to sit upon. A special parking area is designated for individuals with wheelchairs and scooters at Committal Shelter B. Parking is also available for the physically disabled near the ceremony site in Section 403. Cemetery personnel will be assisting attendees upon arrival at the cemetery. For further information, contact the cemetery office Monday – Friday from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM by calling (352) 793-7740.

Sarasota National Cemetery (9810 State Hwy 72 Sarasota) The Memorial Day Service is on Saturday, May 30, at 10:00 AM. From 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM there will be an open house. For information, call 941-922-7200.

South Florida National Cemetery (6501 S. State Road 7 Lake Worth) The Memorial Day ceremony begins at 1:00 PM on Monday, May 25. The featured speaker will be Admiral LeRoy Collins, Director of the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs. Captain Benjamin Lubin, U.S. Marine Corps and recent Afghanistan returnee, will speak. For more information call 561-649-6489.

St Augustine National Cemetery (104 Marine St, St. Augustine) The service begins at 10:00 AM on Monday, May 25. The ceremony is sponsored by the Military Officers Association of America, the Florida National Guard, and the St. Johns County Veterans Service Office. Honor guards

from veterans service organizations and civic organizations will participate. Music will be provided by the Ancient City Pipes and Drums. The names of veterans from St. Johns County who have passed away since Veterans Day 2008 will be read. For more information call Mr. George McCray of the MOAA at 904-797-7388 or 904-669-3305

POST 9/11 GI BILL (<http://www.gibill.va.gov/>) The Post-9/11 GI Bill is for individuals with at least 90 days of aggregate service on or after September 11, 2001, or individuals discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days. An honorable discharge is required to be eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The Post-9/11 GI Bill will become effective for training on or after August 1, 2009.

This benefit provides up to 36 months of education benefits. Generally benefits are payable for 15 years following release from active duty. This benefit is payable only for training at an Institution of Higher Learning, i.e, college or university training.

Starting May 1, 2009, the Department of Veterans Affairs will begin accepting applications for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The application form, which includes instructions for submitting completed applications, is VA Form 22-1990, Application for VA Education Benefits, Dec 2008. It is available online at <http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-22-1990-ARE.pdf>.

The form requires that individuals currently eligible for another education benefit make an irrevocable election from their existing program to the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Typically individuals who are eligible for more than one benefit may use a combined total of 48 months of entitlement. Therefore, those individuals eligible for the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) program should be advised that if they have entitlement remaining under the MGIB, the number of months of Post-9/11 GI Bill entitlement they will be eligible for will be equal to the number of months remaining under MGIB. However, if they exhaust all of their MGIB entitlement, then they may be entitled to a maximum of 12 additional months of entitlement under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

VA will be reviewing applications under the Post-9/11 GI Bill and issuing Certificates of Eligibility (COEs) to qualified individuals. The COE will contain basic eligibility information including months of entitlement, period of eligibility and benefit level. If a specific school and program has been chosen, the COE will also indicate if Post- 9/11 GI Bill benefits are payable for that school and program. Upon receipt of the COE, veterans should retain a copy for their records and submit a copy to the VA Certifying Official at the school they plan to attend.

Generally, schools may certify enrollments up to 120 days before the beginning of a term. However, benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill are not payable until August 1, 2009, therefore, VA is not yet accepting enrollment certifications. Schools will be notified when VA begins accepting enrollment certifications for the Post- 9/11 GI Bill.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-reposessed homes): www.ocwen.com

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov